



Strengthening the Healthcare System Through Nonprofit Sector Engagement, Multi-sectoral Policy Response, and International Collaboration

Final Report of Ivana Chapčáková, M.A.

Background

My reasons for applying to the AFCSLS Young Leaders Program stemmed from my desire to help strengthen the health system in Slovakia through nonprofit sector engagement, cross-sector policy solutions and international collaboration, to better serve the health needs of women in Slovakia, and internationally.

As a program manager and consultant for the nonprofit sector in areas of health, gender and human rights, I have worked in different countries and have seen how nonprofit organizations can play an important role in a country's healthcare system by providing health services and by influencing domestic health policies. These types of nonprofits are very common in the United States, but are rare in Slovakia. I wanted to apply this model in Slovakia to improve the healthcare system and access to services addressing women's health needs. My project plan involved establishing a Slovak-based not-for-profit health organization, with an international scope. In order to translate my project plan into effective action, I needed additional capacity building and exposure in global health leadership.

I became aware of the AFCSLS Young Leaders Program through my personal network. What appealed to me about YLP was the freedom it afforded me to design my own program and tailor it to my individual training needs, with a perfect balance of advanced training and hands-on experience. I used my personal and professional network to help me identify potential American Partners. First, I worked on securing my internships. After my internships were confirmed, I proceeded to submit my YLP application to AFCSLS and enroll for courses at the New York University. The logistical preparation was a little challenging as it involved arranging trips (airfare, visas, etc.) to and from multiple countries according to a strict timeline.

American Partners

Executive Training: New York University (NYU) – NYU is ranked as one of the top academic institutions in the world. I chose NYU because its newly redesigned MPH Program featured a concentration in Global Health Leadership that was specifically designed to train individuals with prior graduate degrees for leadership roles in public health settings across the globe. In addition to the academic caliber of NYU courses, the program and the university provide an unparalleled opportunity for networking and collaborations with top health institutions and organizations in New York City.

Internship: Africare - Africare is a leader among private, charitable U.S. organizations assisting Africa with programs in Health, HIV/AIDS, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, and Women's Empowerment. As a U.S.-based organization working internationally, Africare is a leader in promoting nonprofit engagement and international collaboration in health.

Naturopathic Medicine for Global Health – NMGH is a nonprofit health care organization seeking to promote Naturopathic Medicine as a feasible and cost effective means of healthcare. NMGH

works to develop sustainable solutions for improving public health in developing countries, with a particular focus on vulnerable populations such as women and children, by combining elements of modern and naturopathic medicine.

In designing my internship, I had two objectives in mind: 1) to engage in collaborative capacity-building with international health organizations through participation in their program operation, and shadowing of the senior management staff, and 2) to build lasting partnerships.

Brief Evaluation Statement

My overall program objective was to gain knowledge and practical experience that would enable me to integrate a nonprofit enterprise into the Slovak health system, and to strengthen multi-sectoral policy response and international collaboration. I am pleased to report that all of my program aims have been met. The AFCSLS Young Leaders Program is definitely one of the highlights of my professional career development. What I appreciated most about this program is that it allowed me to design a truly unique training program to address my individual capacity-building needs.

Detailed Description

I completed two courses from the Global Health Leadership concentration addressing health system and health policy issues: 1) Health Systems and Reform, and 2) Estimating Impacts in Policy Research. The training emphasized: skill-building in health system analysis; identifying strategies for assessing policy impact; and conducting health policy analysis using STATA (statistical analysis software). The course work was challenging and rigorous, but it sharpened and expanded my existing skills set, especially in applying various methods of policy analysis. These skills will be very useful in helping me evaluate health policies in Slovakia and use this information in planning health interventions. In addition to the formal course work, I took advantage of many public health lectures and events that were going on in NYC. For example, I attended a book launch, "Good health at low cost 25 years on. What makes a successful health system?" at the Rockefeller Foundation.

Through my internships with Africare and NMGH, I obtained a hands-on experience in managing international health organization. I was able to contribute to program operation and development while receiving valuable lessons and coaching from senior managers along the way. At Africare, I have spent 1 month working alongside the Senior Health Coordinator on program evaluation. I also had an opportunity to learn about Africare's work at the policy level, and how it supports the Ministry of Health in identifying and responding to national health policy priorities. I am certain that I will be able to adapt some of the strategies for engaging local government and other stakeholders on health policy issues in my future work. At NMGH, I have spent nearly 5 months assisting the CEO with various aspects of organization's operations, including establishing a community health workers program. Having my internship at two organizations that are very different in terms of size, scope, funding, and structure has allowed me to compare different systems, and helped me refine plans for my own organization.

Last but not least, this program has provided me with conceptual framework and tools for identifying policy areas and challenges in Slovakia that could be connected to the global women's health movement, and has exposed me to a range of strategies for analyzing them and developing effective responses.

Organization and Time Schedule

The program commenced and concluded according to the timetable. However, I have made changes to my internship dates. My internship with Africare was shortened from two to one month to allow time to handle administrative issues related to my enrollment at NYU, and to get acquainted with the university and its vast resources before commencement of the courses. This change in the timetable also

allowed me to start my internship with NMGH prior to September. Additionally, I have reduced the number of courses for my executive training from 3 to 2, partly because of the tuition cost, but also because I wanted to have sufficient time for both my studies and my internship. This has proved to be a good decision.

Program Cost

The total anticipated cost of the program was \$19,514. The actual program cost turned out to be \$18,015.

Expense Type	Anticipated Costs (\$)	Actual Costs (\$)
Executive training tuition and registration/service fee	10,215	11,357
Administrative fees (visa fees, etc.)	140	215
International travel	2,600	2,800
Local transportation (\$104/mo. x 6 calendar mos.)	624	520
Medical insurance	635	623
Monthly maintenance (\$750/mo. x 6 calendar mos.)	4,500	2,400
Contingency	500	0
Supplies (office consumables, books)	300	100
Total	19,514	18,015

Budget narrative: The tuition cost reflects the slight increase in the tuition for the current academic year, and is based on 8 credits. The transportation in Liberia was provided by the host organization therefore the actual transportation cost was lower than anticipated. The actual visa cost reflects both the US visa and the Liberian visa, which was not anticipated initially. The monthly maintenance cost was lower than anticipated because I was able to secure accommodation in NYC at no cost through my personal network, and the accommodation in Liberia was provided by the host organization also at no cost.

Program Benefits

The YLP has allowed me to grow and develop my skills and leadership qualities in ways that I would not have been able to achieve or afford on my own. I was able to combine top quality training at one of the best universities in the United States with a global practical experience in health policy and management. The synergies that were created between the academic training and the practical component of my program allowed me to immediately test and apply what I had learned in class during my internship and in turn, use my internship experience as a basis for a more informed learning. The diversity of perspectives and approaches to which I was exposed during both the executive training and the internship is unparalleled. In addition to gaining valuable skills and experience, participating in this program has allowed me to grow my professional network and connect with organizations (including my American partners), practitioners and scholars across diverse disciplines who share my interests in gender and health equity. From lawyers and doctors to social workers and economists, I am certain this professional network will be of great value and resource as I pursue my nonprofit health organization plan.

Since the completion of the program, I have been working on a nonprofit organization business plan and on the application for a nonprofit status. I plan to file for a nonprofit status in the second half of 2012 and have the organization fully operational by the end of 2013. The professional connections I made during this program were invaluable. I have received support from one of my American Partners, NMGH, in drafting the organization's bylaws and developing Terms of Reference for the nonprofit board. We are also going to explore ways to collaborate on projects related to women's health, and maybe host a public

health talk by NMGH on natural and holistic healthcare for women. NMGH has pledged its support to help me develop a naturopathic program once the organization is up and running.

Risks

It is too early to be able to assess the impact of possible risks on the execution of my project. Possible risks include organizational and systems barriers to successful implementation and sustainable community benefit performance, and balancing the community's needs with financial capabilities. Financial sustainability and overreliance on donors is another potential risk. However, I believe that the partnerships I have established during my program will help me overcome some of these challenges through technical assistance, sharing resources and ideas, and collaborative problem-solving.

Acknowledgements

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